



UWS Academic Portal

Becoming Imperceptible M/Other

Kosmala, Katarzyna

Published in:
n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal

Published: 31/01/2017

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Kosmala, K. (2017). Becoming Imperceptible M/Other: Negotiating Porous Multiple Selves. *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*, 39, 86-95 . <http://www.ktpress.co.uk/nparadoxa-volume-details.asp?volumeid=39>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UWS Academic Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact pure@uws.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Becoming Imperceptible M/Other: Negotiating Porous Multiple Selves

Katarzyna Kosmala

The persistence of patriarchal constructions of motherhood and their associated values combined with the actual discrimination against mothers in employment strategies in the operation of labour markets and marginal childcare provision by governments can be envisaged as one of most difficult and unresolved areas in contemporary feminist research. This paper explores some of the tensions in construction of motherhood today, drawing on the examples of the contemporary women's art practices who seek to address some of these tensions in their work. Works of Croatian artists Ines Matijević Cakić, Martina Grlić, Gordana Bakić and Polish artist Hanna Nowicka who featured in the *Exporting Zagreb* exhibition held at the National Museum of Gdansk in 2016 will be discussed. One of the premises of this exhibition was to acknowledge women's remarkable contribution to the field of contemporary art on the subject of memory construction and I contributed to the catalogue on this subject.¹

Motherhood here is understood as a choice in the context of contemporary living and precarious employment for artists as well as a social and civil claim with legitimate socio-legal entitlements. In particular, the paper addresses some of the challenges associated with life today as an artist, based on continuous negotiations of multiple selves that make up contemporary forms of 'nomadic' motherhood that draw on Rosi Braidotti's notion of nomadic subjectivity. Related to that, the porous boundaries of contemporary motherhood are conceptualised and discussed as a possible condition for emergence of a particular episteme in creative practice, born out of being "in-between" different nation-states as well as forms of subjectivity.

Let's start with addressing how the contemporary condition of motherhood is also linked to the contested notion of precariousness. We could argue, following on from Judith Butler's investigation into human vulnerability in her book *Prekarious Lives: The Power of Mourning and Violence* that, while what can be termed as precariousness 'is common to all life and contemporary living', a state of precarity associated with the broader definition of the contemporary moment of neo-liberalism is largely politically induced.² Such a positioning of

individual agency in relation to precarity also implies vulnerability. In her reflections on precarious conditions, Butler returns to Emmanuel Levinas and his analysis of the meaning of being human, and from such a basis, argues for the kind of political and ethical work needed to achieve peace globally, and indeed, for creating a condition for better, ‘liveable’ lives.³ Analysing Butler’s ethical position, Moya Lloyd pointed out that for Butler, the body is central to this conceptualisation of vulnerability since it is precisely the body that exposes us and opens us to the other, their gaze, touch and various forms of violence.⁴ These ideas of being human, vulnerability and the body, I would argue all require unpacking in relation to the particular conditions around motherhood and art production which combine geo-location with individual circumstances. It could be argued that the key phrases surrounding precarity, such as the unstable condition of today’s living, based on flexible working which materialises in context-dependent and time-contingent employment and relies heavily on self-organization and disposability, all form persistent conceptualisations of work organization as gender-neutral that perpetuate the discrimination against working women in different labour markets, and in particular, work against those who are also primary carers. Linked to this idea, Silvia Federici in her lecture critiquing precarious labour theory pointed out that reproductive work remains a terrain of struggle, when she asked questions about ‘how we struggle on this terrain without destroying the people you care for’.⁵

Challenging the “gender-neutral” perception of precarity, it is also necessary to raise recent concerns around the agency of art and motherhood in the context of the precarity, of daily living, flexible, context dependent and time-contingent employment as well as mobility requirements, because we need to take into account caring responsibilities. How does a general concept of labour mesh with ideas about “creative labour” and yet continue to produce mothers as artists as an anomaly, even when there are now many mothers working as artists today or many working artists who become mothers and maintain their practice as artists? By linking art work to a notion of precarity, Pavel Büchler, Czech conceptual artist succinctly pointed out the ambiguity most commonly associated with creative labour today: ‘We live in a culture of jobholders (and jobseekers) where almost all identity is derived from what you do for a living. Within this culture the ambiguity of artistic practice as a job is what really creates a space for it and what gives artistic production a meaning as a kind of idle protest against the way things are, including the ways in which our professional and personal identities are formed, seen and understood.’⁶

Today, many mothers are involved in creative labour - artists, writers and curators – and as a result inevitably occupy a particular privileged-yet-unprivileged position associated with continuous negotiations of socio-economic as well as emotional boundaries of contemporary mothering structures, ‘nomadic’ subjectivity and uncertainty associated with creative work and ways of living between countries or cities.

The dominant account of the nomad used is often “gendered male” with women subsumed into a “they”, and as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s book, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, have explained it is an unusual path that a nomad follows: ‘he goes from one point to another [...] although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay [...]. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of a nomad is the *intermezzo*’.⁷ Rosi Braidotti’s argument develops this idea for women by arguing that the nomadic could be envisaged as a form of a navigational tool; in other words, a tool that can help to direct the conditions of the present associated with advanced neo-liberal Capitalism and characterised by, among other things, an overall displacement (including a network of support, or the circles of influence and power) and a state of mobility. She has emphasised the multiplying potential of advanced Capitalism that produces shifting waves of ‘genderisation, sexualisation, and racialisation’ as well as the naturalisation of multiple “others”.⁸ It is this naturalisation which has meshed with the conceptualisation of forms of neo-liberal Capitalist labour, as precarious and manifest in “not having a job”, but nevertheless working on zero-hours contracts, part-time and casual forms of temporary labour in multi-national industries which indeed feeds into very romantic conceptions of being a free-lance and being an artist today. These shifting waves, as Braidotti further argued, have disrupted the dialectical relationship between the empirical referents of Otherness, including women, and the processes of discursive formation of genderisation, racialization and naturalisation, radically challenging the coherence of feminism’s concentration on a female political subject. Braidotti has referred to the maternal role of women as both ‘biocultural entities’ and political subjects, particularly in her references to developing a feminist political standpoint. For an effective female voice and feminist subject position today, it is necessary to ‘affirm the positivity of female subjectivity at a time in history when our acquired perceptions of ‘the subject’ are being radically questioned’.⁹

Braidotti has further elaborated on the problems of producing an effective feminist politics and navigating process in the current conditions of the global advanced Capitalism as follows: ‘the perverse political economy of controlled mobility and opportunism calls for new analytical tools. If we want to navigate, let alone manipulate, this system, we need to change our ethics, fight negativity with affirmation, inertia with creativity. The result is a subject that is multiple and becoming, constantly in flux. Just as the dialectical subject was the subject that thought fit to overturn a dualist system, the multiple, processual one is the one able to pervert the flexible system’.¹⁰

It could be argued that nomadic subjectivity, through both an ‘inter’ and ‘mezzo’, can possibly offer a particular line of enquiry, a philosophy of a life and an approach to practice, embracing a sense of ambiguity, multiple dislocations and multiple becomings. Multiple dislocations can include a dislocation in reference to a geographical place, to porous boundaries of one’s subjectivity and mapped roles, as well as in reference to pervasive cultural conventions associated with contemporary motherhood; that is, challenging those constructed on a dualistic, hetero-normative paradigm. The question emerges whether women occupying a creative practice – an artist, a writer, a philosopher - are recognised as sublimated (in this role), negotiating porous multiple selves of being a mother, a woman, a guide, a lover, a professional and a politician? Or, as a consequence, does the woman artist become imperceptible, impossible to be seen, heard or felt as a distinct entity, dispersed and mediated except in readings of herself through the unconscious? Many women artists return again and again to their childhoods and those of their children, in both a physical and emotional sense, in order to engage with this question of subjectivity and unravel the limited perceptions of themselves associated with these multiple identities and challenges associated with forms of identification.

How can we take these ideas into questions about artistic production by artists who are also mothers and link them to a critique of the patriarchal construction of contemporary motherhood? Firstly, it is important to point out that the lifestyle choice for any working mother can be envisaged as an effect of her positionality, and more precisely a degree of assimilation within a rhizomatic position. We could argue that women and men make history in circumstances, often that are not of their own choosing. In fact, a notion of choice is an over-signified term, given that in reality everyone’s choices are largely limited by their economic, political and social circumstances in which they find themselves. Nevertheless,

human capacity for imagination and invention occurs regardless of these circumstances. Access to knowledge, skills and training opportunities can be transformative but limited in terms of time pressure linked to caring responsibilities and types of family life associated with motherhood. These societal pressures as well as peer pressure materialise in a perpetual sense of guilt, sometimes manifested through illness or depression that can be further debilitating for family and professional life and in continuous renegotiations. In case of women artists for example, such a position can support practice born out weaving together experiences that are based on a close connection between one's thinking, doing art, caring and living. In 2009, Hal Foster identified contemporary art practice with the precarious condition that many artists share and it is how they respond to this by creating meanings from uncertain circumstances, especially through a comment or an evocation of discourse, and in the work's association with conditions of socio-economic instability that is important.¹¹ Such processes can be specifically addressed and associated with reimagining the precarious condition into spaces of opportunity in the global North, and not necessarily linking them to discourse of poverty, instability and "far away living conditions" in the global South. Therefore, for a mother who is also an artist or a writer, creative thought, critical mind and an artistic endeavour are closely and interchangeably tied with existential reality of being a primary carer, negotiating the shifting boundaries of female subjectivity, and in this connection with a mothering role.

Braidotti's nomadic subject is also centred on questions of positionality, contingency and change for women as political subjects. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* is a book very much concerned with the questions of identity, subjectivity, power and difference, Braidotti has explained her position in relation to feminism as being aimed at and associated with 'articulating the questions of individual, embodied, gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity, connecting them both with the problem of knowledge and epistemological legitimation'.¹² It could be argued that Braidotti through a lens of nomadism, and in the case of this paper a nomadic mother, posits that feminists today need to engage with both conscious political choices as well as be in touch with their unconscious desires, and on a basis of such engagement, develop appropriate strategies to deal with contemporary condition. And on a positive note, the desire that Braidotti has called upon doesn't need to be framed in the authority of the past only, nor is it linked exclusively to a notion of lack (from Lacanian psychoanalysis).¹³ Desire can be in fact envisaged as future-bound and reframed into

continuous becoming (in a reference to a continuous present), embracing affirmation and plenitude, but perhaps inevitably, also a process of becoming imperceptible.

Explorations of the artistic self as well as the self-image of a mother have been taken up by Ines Matijević Cakić. For Cakić, it is the ambivalence of guilt associated with being a mother and being an artist that she attempts to explore in more depth. Through the installation *Coffee and books* (2015) and in the series of drawings *Matrixial narratives* (2011-2014), Cakić comments on the social mechanisms of guilt imposition and unchallenged ways of gendering childcare responsibilities *vis a vis* a construction and formation of a maternal bond. A father is absent from the work, even though he also is acting as primary carer. Or was it grandparents who looked after the children in Cakić's absence from home? She leaves this unanswered. What is unique about feminist undertones in Cakić's lens on motherhood is how she explores women's feelings and ambivalences towards motherhood and its nuances, putting at a centre of her investigation a sense of guilt, a subject not normally tackled by a male artist about fatherhood.

Mom is going to Zagreb – Archive of encounters (2012-2014) is an intimate study of mothering, initiated by the birth of the artist's second child. In the installation, where it is combined with *Coffee and Books* piece, a white leather folder is placed at a table, lit up by the desk lamp, and it contains thirty object drawings that have been systematically classified, numbered, and labelled. The title *Mom is going to Zagreb* is taken from a short letter the artist's child wrote to her before one of her work-related trips to Zagreb. The letter contains this very phrase 'Mum is going to Zagreb' and a drawing of a minuscule heart. Cakić commented on the powerful feeling of separation experienced each time due to her work commitments requiring an artist continuous travelling to and from her home in a peripheral town Osijek to galleries, art school and other institutional commitments around the country: 'Through the period of my absence from home, most often during my business trips to Zagreb, or elsewhere, I tend to bring small presents to my children when I return home. It seems that the little present is something they are expecting. I buy these gifts often in a hurry, for instance at the bus station before my bus leaves, or in other places. They serve as a remedy to the children, dealing with the discomfort during the period of separation. With time, Nola and Toma [her children] have begun to give me presents.'¹⁴

The artist's folder is a drawn archive of these "transitional" gifts that the artist received from her own children on her return home from her business trips, from being away from home, from her absence – there is a piece of rock, a bunch of grass, some chestnuts, meadow flowers, a lid from a yoghurt pot, etc. The drawings are made approximately in scale 1:1. The artist says her decision to draw them came about because the gifts received began 'to rot and to decay',¹⁵ as this seemed the most appropriate medium to register and to archive their presence in her exchanges with her children. The style of an amateur herbarium is accentuated with achromatic tonality, with a minimal contrast of light and dark tones.

Her drawn archive represents the relational space between the mother and the child, a space where the other and the other's needs can be recognised and acknowledged. It is a transformational space where a physical separation is evidenced and its complexities acknowledged even as 'mummy's guilt' materialises into an art work. This is the mother's reflection on her own dedication to her artistic practice, and about the development of her children as independent subjects from her as they have the chance to live their own experiences, outside the maternal wings during her absence. At the table, there are also empty coffee cups with tinted with dried unfinished coffee; signifiers of long working hours and of a sense of being always in a hurry. This work can be read as a more complete self-portrait of a caffeine dependent, accomplished emancipated women and an artist who still needs to juggle work and home responsibilities, complete her projects late at night when children are asleep, and to find ways to manage the associated guilt of being a mum who is often not there as well as regarding her own focused attention to work-related tasks. The books on the table have been carefully chosen, each addressing the questions of motherhood from a different disciplinary angle, and as indicators of the numerous ongoing commentary on the social construction of motherhood and pervading stereotypes; we see the books on representation of motherhood in arts, on psychology of mothering as well as on motherhood and unconscious. In case of Cakić, it is inevitability of travel and earning a living from underpaid teaching jobs 'here and there' that is a price paid by a mother-artist in order to reconcile these roles and navigate the guilt of separation from her children.

In *Matrixial narratives*, Cakić explored her own autobiographical experience of pregnancy, including the anxieties and affective feelings associated with becoming a mother and reflecting on corporeality of her own pregnant body, as she explained: 'I have finalized *Matrixial Narratives* during my own personal time of pregnancy, and it is a product of that

state and process. Contents that I am exploring and presenting in this work are a reflection of a specific type of thinking which stems from a bodily experience, my pregnant body, a mother's body, a state which changed the feeling of my own being and has opened new aspects in creative thinking.'¹⁶ The series is made up of nine large drawings, tonal studies drawn with pencil, as the artist explained, equivalent to nine prenatal months; constructing a visual diary of the prenatal period. Each drawing in a roundel design 140 cm in diameter was made during a specific stage of pregnancy *1. Anticipation, 2. Disruption, 3. Identity, 4. Control, 5. Love, 6. Identification, 7. Shape, 8. Name and 9. Separation*. The round frame symbolises a full moon, indicating a time period during which the particular drawing was made.¹⁷ The compositions combine figurative interpretations made of a self-portrait of the artist and portraits of her daughter mixed with motifs of nature set in interiors and exteriors and accompanied with short texts of diary entries of pregnancy. Cakić's work grapples with persisting patriarchal constructions of motherhood in today's Croatia that continues to subscribe to the mother the majority of child-caring responsibilities.

The inter-subjectivity explored in spaces of a mother and a child in Cakić's works can also be read in relation to writings of the Israeli-born philosopher, psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, as she referred to the ambivalence of I and non-I in relation to becoming a m/Other in conceptualisation of *the matrixial borderspace*. Lichtenberg Ettinger stated: 'I cannot fully handle events that profoundly concern me, they fade-in-transformation while my non-I becomes wit(h)ness to them...In the matrixial psychic sphere, my imprints will be transcribed in the other, and to begin with in the m/Other. Thus, my others will process traumatic events for me, like my m/Other processed archaic events for my premature and fragile subjectivity'.¹⁸ With her theorisation of the matrixial gaze, Ettinger highlighted the process of becoming a partial subject via transformation in time and space, while Cakić attempts to construct memory of the present on such basis in her articulations of motherhood. This becoming of a partial subject is evident in Cakić's lens though her negotiation of working time, being constantly on a move, and in between spaces and roles. With regard to continuous becoming and the possibility the work will be read as imperceptible, it seems useful to draw on Bracha Ettinger and her emphasis on the ambivalence of I and non-I in relation to becoming a m/Other. Lisa Baraitser in her book *Maternal Encounters: An Ethic of Interruption* also reflects on Ettinger's model of female subjectivity¹⁹ as 'almost-Other and partial subject in-between appearance and disappearance by way of *jouissance* and trauma in real and phantasmatic psychic and mental transconnectedness of I and non-I'.²⁰ Baraitser

points out that in both the maternal and the feminine there is a capacity to believe that there is a possible reality and a meaning without me,²¹ thus, alluding even further to a process of becoming an imperceptible mother. In fact, Western cultures are largely based on the suppression of the mother as the foundation of culture and it could be that a process of becoming imperceptible and “disappearing” links to a sense of not been seen or not being recognised as a subject possessing full subjectivity. These ‘I’s and ‘non-I’s form partial elements, or in other words, partial subjects that make up subjectivity;²² core themes in explorations of mothering imaginaries. There is only continuous becoming. Deleuze builds and expands upon Foucault’s archaeology of the modern subject of ‘bio-power’ but goes much further conceptually, as Braidotti explains. Deleuze replaces the old subject formation with a notion of the subject as a cluster of complex and intensive forces – intensive assemblages which connect and inter-relate with others in a variety of ways. The crucial shift here concerns the inhuman or posthuman vision of what exactly constitutes an assemblage. The French ‘*agencement*’ renders this much better with its sense of an ex-centric, non-anthropocentric form of agency’.²³

Cakić’s works in the *Exporting Zagreb* exhibition 2016, in Gdansk National Museum was put in a dialogue with Martina Grlić’s oil paintings *Jardan 2* (100 cm x 150 cm) and *Podravka* (100 cm x 120 cm), dedicated to the factory work of Communist Yugoslavia, which were realised in hybrid aesthetics mixing traces of post pop-art with a socio-realist tradition. The work comments on invisible mechanics of construction of a working place and a dominant system, sustaining the operating ideology. As I have written about elsewhere, the work in these factories had been done by women who carried the ‘double burden’ of this work without complaint or carried the protest and then continued to work at home as mothers, wives and sisters.²⁴ Grlić indeed enacts in her works idealised visions of Socialist women’s labour in factories bringing to the fore, the problem of the “double burden” adopted unquestioningly as “women’s problem” under so-called Socialist equality.

Nearby in the exhibition was another comparison between two works with different approaches from women artists, Hanna Nowicka’s installations *Scapegoat* (2015) and *Colonial Furniture* and Gordana Bakić’s installation *Infinitive plates* (2016). Hanna Nowicka’s works primarily explore the subjectivity of otherness in a state of becoming as well as in daily living, and she has sought to develop an epistemological position of being ‘in-between’ since 2014 by examining different methods of approaching anthropology in art,

and in particular, taking art practice as exploration of the other.²⁵ *Scapegoat* attempts to represent the archetype of the martyr that has developed to indicate a person taking the blame for others' wrongdoings. A scapegoat is transformed into an embodiment of Otherness, of one not fitting in or belonging to the point of conscious awareness beyond which something cannot be experienced or felt. It could be any other, a m/other, an artist or one in between or one that becomes imperceptible. A gymnastic horse is covered with skin-colour rubber cuts - collected material leftovers from the artist's previously realised works showcased over last ten years, including some of her key artistic oeuvres. The work invites a reflection upon artistic process and its duration. In my view, although perhaps less directly, the installation invites a reflection upon value. What has been sacrificed to make the work? It seems we are in the artist studio, invited to witness the process of making and get a glimpse upon what had to be sacrificed, bearing some comparison with Irish artist Dorothy Cross' works from the 1990s.

Similarly, Croatian artist Gordana Bakić in her installation *Infinitive plates* (2016) adheres to experiences accumulated over time in relation to work processes and working spaces. She in fact recreates an artist's workshop through her painterly experiments with her intermittent construction and deconstruction of spatial image. Architectonics of an imaginary interior-exterior are joined into a complex structure made of continuous representations, whereby an object as well as aspects of its interior are revealed. These combined dwellings are made of memories from each room that Bakić in fact occupied over last ten years through precarious living. In her case the work is not linked with mothering experiences as such but is a reflection on being an artist on a low income.

In close proximity to *Scapegoat*, a series of small photographs, were attached loosely to the wall with the blue-tack. *Colonial furniture* (2015) features Nowicka's own photographs of workshops' interiors where fancy home decorative fixtures are made *a la* 'tribal art' on Java Island, and these offer small glimpses of anonymous women workers amongst furniture, objects and dust-covered storage spaces. Juxtaposing the photographs *Colonial Furniture*, with the *Scapegoat* installation, Nowicka tests the viewers' ability to construct any singular narrative that surround these two works. The picturesque-like portrayal of the workshop's interior and details (in one of the picture we see a woman worker) of making colonial furniture in Java, is represented with various degrees of sharpness that contrasts with the body-like, sensual texture of rubber trimmings that make up the surface of *Scapegoat*. The

experience of these works is very much determined by the viewer's sensory response to the works' material presence.

One of the photographs from *Colonial Furniture* represents a close up of the table, unnaturally scaled up in the context of the factory producing the colonial-style design furniture for European clients, wrapped around with spider webs – it can be read as a tacit, yet, powerful comment upon neo-colonial dimensions of labour dynamics and its gendered nature. The owners of such workshops are predominantly Dutch white middle class men, and local women are the workers. Nowicka suggests that these photos are 'Represented situations [that] symbolically remind me of a colonizer and a colonized....[and] what is significant is a relation between a subject and a colonial object'.²⁶ The situation offers another kind of scapegoat situation, another set of martyrs, or another whose predominant situation links with exploitation for others, and presents a gendered system that is persisting, based on a Colonial hetro-normative construction of identity (white male colonial, female colonised workers). Nowicka's reflection on the anthropology of artistic creation includes here also a political stance which juxtaposes two types of gendered labour: monotonous tasks performed by women in the furniture workshops as well as her own position as a woman artist and working mother today. What appears particularly robust in her artistic approach is a tacit weaving of autobiographical accounts into the larger themes of labour relations and gender discrimination, in her attempts at deconstructing a familiar bond.²⁷

Nowicka also reflects on a mother child relationship through her autobiographical accounts concerning her own mother. Nowicka grapples with the relationship with her own mother and memory around that relationship in two other works, the video, *Shelter* and an installation, *Mummy and I are One*. *Shelter* as well as in *Mummy and I are One*, offer a mother who becomes a template of all mothers. In *Mummy and I are One* a tunnel made of shrubs or a dark passage between two rooms open up its depths of darkness, a symbolic womb perhaps, embodying a mother within each and every m/other. A nomadic mother in Nowicka's works starts from a position of multiple displacements and disruptions - associated with a systemic inertia in reconciling conflict associated with contemporary living and working. She is a Professor in the Academy of Fine Arts in Szczecin, and recently relocated for this job, she is an artist constantly battling to find time for making art, she is a mother who hardly sees her daughter due to geographical distance, and a daughter and a carer of a very ill mother

(*Shelter*), and yet, she embraces multiple points of a call in her continuous becoming (*Scapegoat*), navigating the ambiguous socio-economic conditions and cultural conventions.

For Cakić and for Nowicka, the boundaries of mother-child relationship and its limits seem conceptualised in the way Irigaray speaks of both mother and daughter as a 'we'. Irigaray's feminist project advanced in *Speculum of the Other Woman* overtly critiques the exclusion of women from philosophy. She stated that historically women have been associated with the role of a mother, and this has happened regardless of whether they were a mother or not. She further argued that female identity is always defined according to the role of a mother. She also pointed out that contemporary culture, and predominantly in the West, is founded upon a primary sacrifice of the mother, and subsequently of all women through her defined role.²⁸ Not much seemed to have changed since she wrote this in 1974. This 'we' however, does not subsume one's identity in the other. Instead, it is a fusion (or an assemblage) without a residue, joining textuality and sexuality, a space where the notion of the feminine may reclaim itself, a territorially-bound space related with a methodology born out of a rhizomatic position, and returning to Braidotti, being a nomad, merging living, thinking and creating.

The union with one's mother through the historical construction of 'we', as Lucy Irigaray has pointed out, is impossible to break. Shared experience and memories of corporeal boundaries, a side-by-sideness including shared traumas associated with the biological and emotional conditioning of human subjectivity (proximity-distance, illness, loss of bodily control, dying) inform becoming a m/other and a carer as well as enrich our cultural memory associated with motherhood.²⁹ Relating to a process of becoming, Angie Voela has pointed to how conceptualising Ettinger's matrixial metamorphosis as a construction draws on both co-emergence and co-fading of memory and oblivion.³⁰ Voela further refers to Griselda Pollock's reflection on Ettinger's writings with particular reference to how cultural memory is formed. Pollock suggested that as a part of the experience (of trauma in this case as in the case of a protagonist in *Shelter*), maternal desires can surface and are communicated with or without language, as well as the fact that memories of the past are narrated to us by both mothers and others.³¹

Both, Cakić and Nowicka attempt to re-read the subjectivity of a mother in a state of becoming that challenges and navigates precarious living and as a Deleuzian subject made of inter-connections and hence of multiple becomings. Maybe what can be received by the

viewer is made up of the whole set of assumptions about the imagined and also the utopian inner states of our memory at work.

For Cakić, Bakić and Nowicka, it is a work space and relation to work that continues to be seen as one of the most fundamental pillars of masculine identity construction and a signifier of success in the advanced neo-liberal Capitalist economy. The workplace and organization of work signifies many spaces a factory, an office, a shop floor, a street, as well as a studio and a home. Regardless of the physical place associated with activity of working, it is paid employment that continues as an important anchor of historically constructed masculine identities.³² The alignment of identity with the work one does, regardless of the actual spatial dimension of a workplace, has been equated for long time with realisation of successful masculinity, whether through the career progression, service work, or art practice. Paid employment also acts as the means to get away from home, and in the context of globalised markets, opportunities to travel, go away, be absent and thus become a nomad. And all these constructions have a significant impact on notions of contemporary womanhood, including the role of a mother. Going back to Braidotti, we could argue that negotiation of porous multiple selves in the navigation of contemporary living is realised through continuous multiple becomings, and subsequently, becoming imperceptible, or becoming impossible to be seen, noticed or even felt – becoming invisible as either a mother or an artist, either as a professional or as a private person; also results in another form of becoming a nomad. Yet, such a multi-layered dislocation can also inspire the formation of a new episteme for creative practice and engagement.

In relation to a navigation process that Braidotti alluded to and to engagement that aims to overrun negativity with affirmation,³³ I would like to close with a final reflection on “feminist” politics with regard to the current condition of contemporary nomadic motherhood. I have included inverted commas as I have argued for some time that feminist politics today needs to be situated in a praxis that embraces the new geopolitical reality of advanced Capitalism and work against the historically constructed hegemonic discourses that are perpetuated today, including those about mothers. Such praxis generally embraces a use of multiple sites of production and presentation, responsive modes of working, DIY-like aesthetics and multi-role-based performative identities with their accompanying fragmentary and fluid, spatial and temporal manifestations. Motherhood in its nomadic form is barely perceptible, as ‘a feminist praxis, without border and without name’, but it should not go

unnoticed.³⁴ Perhaps, its recognition as a state of being will provide another solution to, what Jan Verwoert points out, the need for ‘a way forward from political apathy, manifested as ever more atomised pretences of *me*-culture, a mode of being-by-consumption and activism propagated by the media spin. Yet, the reality is....that within the art field we maybe are involuntarily avant-garde, finding ways of economic survival’.³⁵

¹ Katarzyna Kosmala. ‘*Exporting Zagreb*, Constructing the Present of Memory’. In *Exporting Zagreb* Exhibition Catalogue, National Museum of Gdansk, Gdansk, 2016, 20-31.

² Judith Butler, *Precarious Lives: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, Verso: London, 2004.

³ Butler, 2004

⁴ Moya Lloyd. ‘Towards a Cultural Politics of Vulnerability: Precarious Lives and Ungrievable Deaths’ In Terrell Carver and Samuel Allen Chambers (Eds.), *Judith Butler's Precarious Politics: Critical Encounters*. Routledge. 2008, p. 94.

⁵ Silvia Federici, ‘Precarious Labour: A Feminist Viewpoint’, 2006 lecture published at <https://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarious-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/>

⁶ Pavel Büchler. ‘Honest Work: Pavel Büchler interviewed by David Briers’, *Art Monthly*, June 2015.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press. 1987/1980, p. 419.

⁸ Rosi Braidotti. ‘Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity’, *Rhizomes*, 11/12 (Fall 2005/Spring 2006), 2006, 4. Published at <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/braidotti.html>

⁹ Rosi Braidotti. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.77.

¹⁰ Timotheus Vermeulen. ‘Borrowed Energy’, *Frieze*, 165, 2014. <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/borrowed-energy/>

¹¹ Hall Foster. ‘Precarious’, *Art Forum*, December, 2009.

¹² Ibid, 30.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ From the artist’s statement *Mom is going to Zagreb - Archive of encounters* (2012 – 2014).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ (Information obtained from the artist, 2015).

¹⁷ Vlastimir Kusik, ‘Introduction to the *Matrixial Narratives*: Nine Images in One Drawing of Ines Matijević’. Unpublished text obtained from the artist.

¹⁸ Bracha Ettinger. *The Matrixial Borderspace*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press. 2006, p.141

-
- ¹⁹ Lisa Baraitser. *Maternal Encounters: An Ethic of Interruption* Routledge: New York. 2009
- ²⁰ Bracha Ettinger, 2006, 101 in Lisa Baraitser, 2009, 34
- ²¹ Baraitser, 2009, 35
- ²² Bracha Ettinger. 'Metramorphic Borderlinks and Matrixial Borderspace' In John C. Welchman (Ed.) *Rethinking Borders*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 129.
- ²³ Braidotti, 2006, 16.
- ²⁴ Katarzyna Kosmala, 2016. 28-29.
- ²⁵ Nowicka's *Shelter*, 2015, 2.48 min video was showcased in association with *Motherhood and Creative Practice; Maternal Structures in Creative Work* conference and the exhibition *Alternative Maternals* in London South Bank University in June 2015. The video is a study based on the artist's 2012-2014 film footage, and forms a part of a larger project currently being realised. Information obtained from the artist, May 2015.
- ²⁶ From Hanna Nowicka's statement about the work, 2015.
- ²⁷ Katarzyna Kosmala. 'Little? Inner? Girl?', In *Hanna Nowicka Catalogue*, Galeria Arsenal, Bialystok 2005.
- ²⁸ Irigaray, 1985.
- ²⁹ Lucy Irigaray. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- ³⁰ Angie Voela, 'Wit(h)nessing the Other's Trauma. An Exploration of Barbara Loftus's Painting through the Work of Bracha Ettinger'. In Michael O'Loughlin (Ed) *Ethics of Remembering and the Consequences of Forgetting: Essays on Trauma, History and Memory*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, p. 84.
- ³¹ Ibid, 84-85
- ³² Katarzyna Kosmala. 'Sculpting Your Own Success. To Gain or to Give It Up? In Kosmala K, *Imagining Masculinities: Spatial and Temporal Representation and Visual Culture*, Routledge: London and New York, 2013. p. 85.
- ³³ Rosi Braidotti in conversation with Timotheus Vermeulen, In Vermeulen, Timotheus. 'Borrowed Energy', Frieze, 165, 2014. Available online <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/borrowed-energy/>
- ³⁴ Katarzyna Kosmala. 'Sexing the Border Literally? Utopian Tactics of Dealings With/out Institutions'. In Kosmala Katarzyna (Ed) *Sexing the Border: Gender, Art and New Media in Central and Eastern Europe*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle, 2014
- ³⁵ Jan Verwoert. 'All the Wrong Examples', In Stine Hebert and Anne Szefer Karlsen (Eds) *Self-Organised*, Open Editions, London and Hordaland Art Centre, Bergen, 2013. Cited in Kosmala, 2014, p. 226